



General Assembly

Distr.: General
5 August 2026

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Sixty-third session

7 September–9 October 2026

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Visit to Ghana

Report of the Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas*, **

Summary

The Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas visited Ghana from 5 to 14 May 2026 to assess the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. The present report contains its findings and recommendations to the Government.

The visit was focused on the situation of peasant farmers, fisherfolk and pastoralists, with a particular focus on the rights to land and seeds, the rights of women, the situation surrounding illegal mining (*galamsey*) and the environment, and accountability frameworks. The Working Group noted with appreciation the political commitment of the Government of Ghana to improving the well-being of its rural populations and the development of a relatively strong set of laws and policies relevant to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. Despite these legislative achievements, the Working Group noted that the potential of these legal frameworks is significantly diminished by gaps and weaknesses in implementation on the ground and expresses concern regarding policy pivots towards large-scale commercial agriculture, the environmental devastation wrought by illegal mining, and the effects of climate change, which continue to threaten the rights and livelihoods of people in the peasant-based agrarian sector.

* Agreement was reached to publish the present document after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.

** The summary of the report is being circulated in all official languages. The report itself, which is annexed to the summary, is being circulated in the language of submission only.



Annex

Report of the Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas on its visit to Ghana

I. Introduction

1. At the invitation of the Government of Ghana, two members of the Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, Geneviève Savigny and Uche Ewelukwa Ofodile, visited Ghana from 5 to 14 May 2026. The objectives of the visit were to promote the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, identify current initiatives, developments, opportunities and good practices and identify the challenges faced by peasant farmers and other people protected under the Declaration.

2. The Working Group met with government authorities, including officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the Ministry of Local Government, Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture, the Ministry of Labour, Jobs and Employment, the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Trade, Agribusiness and Industry, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology. The Working Group also met with the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, members of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice and representatives of civil society and trade unions. It held discussions with representatives of the United Nations country team and United Nations entities, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The Working Group heard directly from peasant farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists and other rural workers in meetings in Accra, as well as during field visits. The Working Group met with chiefs, district authorities and cocoa-growing communities in the Kyebi area, along with fisherfolk and local authorities in Takoradi.

3. The Working Group thanks the Government of Ghana for the invitation and for the valuable assistance before, during and after its visit to the country. The Working Group also thanks the organizations and individuals with whom it met during the visit and who facilitated site visits and meetings with rights holders and communities. The Working Group appreciated the genuine willingness and openness on the part of all interlocutors to discuss progress and challenges in the protection of the rights contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

II. Context

4. As of 2025, the agricultural sector (covering crops, livestock rearing, forestry and logging, and fishing), accounted for roughly 38.3 per cent of the national workforce¹ and about 22.8 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).² Farmers, pastoralists and fisherfolk experience high levels of informality, with two thirds experiencing “vulnerable employment”.³

5. Ghanaian domestic food security is predominantly reliant on smallholder family farmers, who represent about 80 per cent of all farmers. These family enterprises cultivate

¹ Ghana, Ministry of Finance, “Flash data report vol. 2”, December 2025.

² Ghana Statistical Service, gross domestic product (GDP) bulletin for the third quarter of 2025, available at <https://statsghana.gov.gh/data-statistics/economic-statistics>. See also <https://gna.org.gh/2026/03/ghanas-economy-grows-by-six-per-cent-in-2025-gss/>.

³ See <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/Employment-up-330-000-by-Q3-2025-unemployment-averages-12-8-GSS-2014478>.

modest plots that average approximately 2.5 hectares nationally.⁴ Despite these limitations, smallholder farmers are responsible for producing approximately 80 per cent of the total domestic food supply.⁵

6. The agricultural transformation choices of Ghana are heavily constrained by external factors, including debt repayment obligations, volatile commodity markets, trade regime pressures and ad hoc regulatory shifts, yet the residual risks of these macroeconomic policies are felt most acutely by peasant farmers, fisherfolk and pastoral communities. By prioritizing large-scale, input-intensive agriculture to serve an integrated export sector, the current approach threatens to entrench a dual food system that leaves the family-based agrarian sector increasingly marginalized. Averting this outcome and ensuring that the national transformation agenda does not become a trap for the very communities that it aims to benefit requires genuine political will and a sustained commitment to rights-based support for smallholder farmers.

III. Legislative framework

7. Ghana has signed all nine of the core international human rights treaties and has ratified eight of them.⁶ Ghana has also ratified 8 of the 10 fundamental ILO conventions, as well as 42 technical ILO conventions (with 37 of the ILO conventions ratified by Ghana currently in force). Critically, Ghana has not ratified the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), or the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129). However, it ratified the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188), in August 2024, offering strong protections for artisanal fishers. It has also ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Ghana has a dualist legal system: treaties to which Ghana is a Party become part of national law only through an express Act or resolution of Parliament.⁷

8. The Constitution of 1992 protects a number of human rights, including the rights to life, liberty of the person, dignity and equality before the law, and provides for a prohibition on discrimination on the basis of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status. The Constitution also protects the rights to property and privacy, a fair trial, freedom of speech and free and compulsory education, prohibits appropriation of property, except in certain limited circumstances, and provides for the right of workers to form and join trade unions (art. 12 (1)). Custom is recognized in the Constitution as a source of law; it is applied by customary authorities, as well as by State courts, unless it is found to violate the Constitution. Customary law is subject to statute law.

9. The Constitution provides for the establishment of a national Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, with a broad mandate to investigate complaints of violations of fundamental rights and freedoms, injustice, corruption, abuse of power and unfair treatment by public officials, as well as complaints alleging that the activities of individuals and private enterprises violate the rights contained in the Constitution.

10. Ghana has also recently passed a number of laws that protect some of the rights contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. The Land Act, 2020 (Act 1036), protects land tenure security by codifying customary "usufructuary" interests. The Act allows customary land rights to be registered as legal titles, shielding rural communities from arbitrary eviction by traditional title holders, and establishes customary land secretariats to manage local land administration.

⁴ See <https://www.fao.org/family-farming/data-sources/dataportrait/farm-size/en/>.

⁵ Ghana, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, *Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy* (2007).

⁶ Ghana has not yet ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

⁷ Ghana, Constitution of 1992, art. 75.

11. The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2025 (Act 1146), protects small-scale fishers by legally defining the Inshore Exclusion Zone. The Act prohibits industrial and large semi-industrial vessels from operating in nutrient-rich coastal waters, reserving them exclusively for artisanal canoes.

12. The Social Protection Act, 2025 (Act 1148), mandates sustainable funding for vulnerability programmes such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty initiative. The Affirmative Action Act, 2024 (Act 1121), combats systemic gender discrimination by mandating that at least 30 per cent of key institutional decision-making roles are to be held by women by 2026.

13. However, these legal provisions do not offer sufficient protection to vulnerable rural workers in Ghana. For instance, statutory labour regulations⁸ establish a threshold of 200 continuous days of employment for formal labour protections to apply. This regulatory structure effectively exempts seasonal farmhands, casual agricultural labourers and traditional sharecroppers from formal protections. These groups constitute a large segment of the rural workforce within an unregulated subsistence economy characterized by economic vulnerability and restricted access to formalized social protection schemes.

IV. Challenges and priority areas for action

A. Situation of peasant farmers

14. The combination of global economic trends and domestic fiscal policies has significantly affected the capacity of farmers to maintain adequate livelihoods. While the macroeconomic environment of Ghana has stabilized in 2026, with inflation dropping to the single digits and GDP growth rebounding,⁹ rural households continue to face lingering vulnerabilities. The legacy of past high living costs, combined with localized increases in agricultural inputs and minor exchange rate fluctuations, continues to pressure household budgets.

15. The Ghanaian agricultural sector relies heavily on imported agricultural inputs, including synthetic agrochemicals. Consequently, currency depreciation directly affects the domestic retail cost of imported fertilizers, pesticides and hybrid seeds. This increase in input costs reportedly places financial pressure on smallholder farmers, occasionally forcing farmers into informal debt mechanisms to sustain cultivation activities. Subsidized inputs are reportedly not evenly distributed to all farmers in the country.

16. The Government of Ghana has implemented several prominent agricultural reform initiatives intended to enhance food self-sufficiency, stimulate agroindustrialization and support rural employment. Central to these efforts are the Planting for Food and Jobs programme of 2017 and the Feed Ghana programme of 2025. These initiatives have relied extensively on the mass subsidization of agricultural inputs. To operationalize these distribution networks, the Government introduced the Ghana Agriculture and Agribusiness Platform, a digital system aimed at streamlining the allocation of subsidized and free inputs.

17. While these State interventions have contributed to localized, short-term increases in specific crop yields, analyses provided by academic institutions and civil society indicate structural imbalances in the allocation of State resources. Historically, over 50 per cent of the Planting for Food and Jobs programme budget has been allocated to the procurement and distribution of synthetic chemical fertilizers.¹⁰ Civil society organizations expressed concern that this emphasis prioritized short-term input distribution, with its political benefits, over the cultivation of long-term agronomic resilience and ecologically sound practices.

⁸ Ghana, Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651), sect. 78.

⁹ Bank of Ghana, "Monetary policy report", January 2026.

¹⁰ Godson Aloryito, "Budget credibility and the fertilizer subsidies in Ghana", p. 11 (Washington, D.C., International Budget Partnership, 2023).

18. Furthermore, the prioritization of chemical fertilizers has reportedly occurred at the expense of necessary investments in post-harvest physical infrastructure.¹¹ Civil society has identified a deficit in storage networks, local agroprocessing facilities and all-weather rural feeder roads.¹² The consequence of stimulating crop production without simultaneous expansion of storage infrastructure is substantial post-harvest loss. Data indicate that more than 30 per cent of all locally produced food in Ghana is lost due to spoilage, on the way to market or at the market due to a lack of appropriate storage options.¹³

19. Because financial institutions often perceive the agricultural sector as high-risk, private capital investment in rural storage solutions remains limited and inaccessible. Consequently, smallholder farmers are structurally constrained and unable to store perishable crops to await optimal market pricing. They are hindered by inadequate feeder roads in accessing urban markets directly and must sell produce immediately upon harvest. This dynamic frequently leaves farmers reliant on corporate distributors and informal aggregators, who purchase surplus produce at depressed prices. This outcome challenges the realization by peasants of their right to an adequate standard of living and equitable market access, as mandated by article 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

20. Smallholder farmers and other rural workers confront critical systemic challenges in agricultural production and market access, severely undermining their livelihoods. The increasing frequency of climate shifts and erratic weather patterns has led to highly irregular crop yields, exacerbating the physical and economic vulnerability of these communities. Based on article 16 (2) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, which expressly mandates States to take appropriate measures to facilitate peasants' access to transportation, processing, drying and storage facilities, a systematic failure to provide or enable access to this necessary agricultural infrastructure constitutes a direct impediment to fulfilling that obligation and harms rural economic stability and livelihoods.

21. Structural inequities within agricultural value chains further compound the marginalization of smallholder farmers, exposing them to persistent economic exploitation. Lacking direct access to competitive local and regional markets, farmers are heavily reliant on intermediaries and aggregators. This is a dependency that significantly reduces their profit margins and overall household income. This exploitation is entrenched by a chronic lack of accessible, low-interest credit, which prevents small-scale producers from investing in necessary modernization, acquiring climate-resilient inputs or scaling their operations to build systemic resilience. Under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, peasants have the right to an adequate standard of living, which explicitly includes facilitated access to the means of production necessary to achieve it, including production tools, technical assistance, credit, insurance and other financial services. In addition, States are obligated to take appropriate measures to strengthen and support local, national and regional markets in ways that facilitate and ensure that peasants and other people working in rural areas have full and equitable access to and participation in these markets to sell their products at prices that allow them and their families to attain an adequate standard of living.

22. Current agricultural frameworks have structurally pivoted towards large-scale, input-intensive agro-industrial production models. State priorities, such as the Planting for Food and Jobs 2.0 programme and Ghana Investment Promotion Centre investment mandates, explicitly target the expansion of medium-to-large mechanized operations, the development of commercial irrigation for export-oriented horticulture and the aggressive facilitation of foreign direct investment.¹⁴ This macroeconomic focus risks systematically excluding

¹¹ Karl Pauw, "A review of Ghana's planting for food and jobs program: implementation, impacts, benefits, and costs", *Food Security*, vol. 14, No. 5 (May 2022).

¹² See <https://gna.org.gh/2024/11/direct-resources-towards-addressing-challenges-of-ghanaian-farmers-pfag/>.

¹³ See <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC13085720/>.

¹⁴ This structural shift is codified in the Planting for Food and Jobs Phase II (2024–2028) framework of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, which transitions away from smallholder subsidies towards

smallholder farmers, who form the essential backbone of national food sovereignty and food security. Article 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas requires States to take all appropriate measures to ensure that their rural development, agricultural, environmental, trade and investment policies and programmes contribute effectively to protecting and strengthening local livelihood options and to the transition to sustainable modes of agricultural production. To align better with these fundamental human rights standards, State policies must urgently pivot from a purely export- and investment-driven model to one that guarantees peasant rights to an adequate standard of living and actively advances public policies at the local, national, regional and international levels to advance and protect the rights to adequate food, food security and food sovereignty.

B. Land rights and tenure

23. The Constitution protects the right to own property and safeguards against the compulsory possession or appropriation of property by the State, except in certain limited circumstances, with provisions for fair and adequate compensation and due process. Governance, administration and access to land have been overhauled and consolidated by the Land Act, 2020. The Act codifies land interests and criminalizes illicit activities such as the use of land guards. Specific acts and decrees, alongside the newly enacted Environmental Protection Act, 2025 (Act 1124), govern access to and the use of natural resources. Critical among the foundational statutes is the Water Resources Commission Act, 1996 (Act 522), which vests control of all water resources in the President and prohibits water extraction without prior authorization. While exemptions exist for basic domestic use, the requirement for formal, documented permits poses bureaucratic hurdles for small-scale, community-led irrigation systems utilized by farming communities, leading to conflicts over access. Furthermore, forest reserves are regulated under the Forests Act, 1927, and the Forestry Commission Act, 1999 (Act 571), which govern community-driven approaches such as the Modified Taungya System, allowing farmers to co-manage degraded forests.

24. The system of land ownership, governance and tenure in Ghana comprises various forms of customary ownership and stewardship alongside enacted legislation. Public and State lands are held in trust by the President on behalf of all the people of Ghana, while private lands are generally held in communal ownership or in trust by a stool, skin, clan, family or individual on behalf of a community. The Land Act, 2020, codified these various interests, including allodial (absolute ownership) title, customary freehold and leasehold interests, and explicitly provides for the recording of oral customary grants, which have been recognized as valid by case law. In practice, protection from forced eviction for landless peasant farmers who lack documentation detailing their farming rights remains a challenge for those unaware of their rights.

25. As the commercial agriculture, infrastructure and mining sectors of Ghana continue to grow, demands for access to land will correspondingly increase, leading to the potential displacement or resettlement of communities. To address this, the Land Act, 2020, introduced mandatory pre-acquisition funding for compensation to make compulsory land acquisition fairer and more transparent.

26. The Environmental Protection Act, 2025, consolidates the environmental protection laws of Ghana and mandates that business enterprises conduct environmental and social impact assessments and public hearings for activities that may lead to displacement or resettlement. Similarly, the Land Act, 2020, formally recognizes stakeholder engagement as a mandatory component of compulsory acquisition. However, in practice, access to information is highly inadequate. According to information received by the Working Group from civil society organizations, mandatory project notices are routinely displayed only in English, posted for brief periods and confined to regional district assembly buildings rather than being disseminated directly among the affected communities. Consequently,

commercial aggregators, alongside policies of the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre prioritizing agribusiness land banks for foreign direct investment.

marginalized rural populations and smallholders are frequently denied a meaningful opportunity to participate in decision-making or proactively protect their security of tenure.¹⁵

27. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas stresses that the exploitation of natural resources traditionally held or used by rural workers is permitted based on a duly conducted social and environmental impact assessment and requires good faith consultations. Peasants possess the right to active and free participation, directly or through their representative organizations, in preparing and implementing policies, programmes and projects that may affect their lives, land and livelihoods.

28. Farmers frequently focus on the cash compensation element of resettlement packages, to the exclusion of participatory planning processes, standards for disclosure of information, the quality and location of resettlement housing and access to health, education, transport and sustainable livelihoods. Communities resettled in the past continue to struggle with self-sufficiency due to being allocated land with less favourable access to farmland or waterways, distance from markets and a lack of public services.¹⁶ The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas stipulates that peasants have the right to sustain a secure home and community in peace and dignity and must be protected against forced eviction. When eviction is unavoidable, the State must provide or ensure fair and just compensation for any material or other losses and ensure that compensation is provided to tenant farmers and not only landowners or chiefs. Transitional support to resettled communities must be comprehensive to guarantee an adequate standard of living and facilitated access to production tools, technical assistance and financial services, without creating long-term dependency on businesses to supply basic infrastructure.

29. The Government's efforts to update regulations, as demonstrated by the Environmental Protection Act, 2025, and the Land Act, 2020, mark structural progress in managing land access and compensation. These legislative milestones must continue to be closely aligned with the requirements set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. The regulatory enforcement mandate of the Environmental Protection Authority over pesticide control, climate adaptation and environmental compliance has been expanded, ensuring better monitoring of rural conditions. Ongoing land administration improvements are aimed at making land acquisition more transparent and efficient for businesses while meeting the State's obligations to protect human rights, improve tenure security and alleviate rural poverty.

30. Outside urban centres, customary authorities wield considerable influence over land management. The Land Act, 2020, reinforces this system by holding chiefs, *tendanas*, clan heads and family heads responsible as fiduciaries, requiring them to manage land fairly, transparently and impartially. The Act also obligates them to establish customary land secretariats to maintain formal records of land transactions alongside the State registry system. Despite customary land ownership being acknowledged, negotiations regarding land acquisition and resettlement still heavily rely on local chiefs, some of whom struggle to accurately identify the rights of all land users or communicate transparently with their communities.

31. Under the Land Act, 2020, actors negotiating with communities over land acquisition or land use have a responsibility to consult with all rights holders, and not only the chiefs (who have a fiduciary obligation to everyone in the clan, stool or skin), and pay particular attention to potentially vulnerable or marginalized groups, including landless tenant farmers, regardless of whether the negotiations result in voluntary resettlement.

¹⁵ George Christoffel Schoneveld and Laura German, "Translating legal rights into tenure security: lessons from the new commercial pressures on land in Ghana", *The Journal of Development Studies*, 50, No. 2 (2014). See also Emmanuel Mensah Aboagye, "Assessing inclusiveness for indigenous communities in mineral rights allocation in Ghana", *Heliyon*, vol. 10, No. 8 (April 2024).

¹⁶ Phil Faanu, "Extractive disjuncture: livelihood disruptions and resettlement in the Talensi District's mining communities in Ghana", *African Geographical Review* (19 February 2026). See also <https://jsm.gig.eu/journal-of-sustainable-mining/vol24/iss3/7/> and <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/6/4/80>.

32. In the case of divorce or the death of a husband, women tenant farmers are at heightened risk of receiving insufficient compensation for their loss of access to land and inability to adequately replace former agricultural activities with new sustainable livelihoods. Historically, traditional land tenure systems distributed land exclusively to men as “heads of household”, while women cultivated food crops on communally held land. The Land Act, 2020, addresses this by explicitly prohibiting discriminatory customary practices and introducing spousal property rights provisions (sects. 34 and 47) that codify the presumption of equitable ownership of property acquired during marriage. However, peasant women are often unaware of their rights and rely on civil society partners to provide them with legal advice.

33. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas requires States to eliminate all forms of discrimination against peasant women and ensure that they enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms on the basis of equality. States must ensure that women have equal access to, and use and management of, land and natural resources and receive equal or priority treatment in land and agrarian reform and land resettlement schemes. Business enterprises calculating compensation must assess how women and men experience the impacts of displacement differently, consult with all community members and ensure that appropriate compensation covers food crops as well as cash crops.

C. Right to seeds

34. The right of peasants to maintain, control, protect and develop their own seeds and traditional knowledge is enshrined in article 19 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. Concurrently, article 15 guarantees the right to food sovereignty and culturally appropriate food. The Working Group received a number of complaints about the current seed law system.

35. The seed governance framework of Ghana has been substantially revised, notably through the Plants and Fertilizer Act, 2010, and the Plant Variety Protection Act, 2020, to align with international seed trade and intellectual property standards that prioritize uniform, commercially bred varieties. The legislation requires that a seed variety demonstrate distinctness, uniformity and stability to be legally recognized, protected and formally traded on the commercial market. During the visit, testimonies emphasized that traditional, climate-adapted seeds, which have been developed over centuries of customary peasant selection, are biologically dynamic and inherently heterogeneous, meeting the diverse needs of the country.

36. Because traditional seeds naturally lack the rigid uniformity and stability mandated by distinctness, uniformity and stability criteria, they generally fail to meet the State’s legal definitions for formal certification. Consequently, the formal packaging, commercial exchange and market sale of traditional, uncertified seeds by local farmers operate in a regulatory grey area and may be marginalized. Concerns were expressed that the implementation of the Plant Variety Protection Act, 2020, may inadvertently suppress customary seed-sharing systems, posing challenges for compliance with article 19 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. Furthermore, rights holders reported a shifting agronomic landscape, wherein highly resilient, culturally significant crops such as pearl millet and sorghum cultivated in arid northern regions were gradually being replaced with input-dependent commercial white maize varieties.

37. The introduction of genetically modified crops, under the Biosafety Act, 2011 (Act 831), which regulates the development, handling and release of genetically modified organisms in Ghana, raises significant considerations regarding the right to food and to participation in environmental decision-making. Article 10 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas explicitly mandates that States ensure the participation of peasants in decision-making processes regarding policies that directly affect their lives and livelihoods.

38. Civil society organizations reported ongoing concerns regarding the processes surrounding the commercial release of the genetically modified *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) cowpea, which was officially cleared for commercial distribution in July 2024 following the dismissal of a long-standing lawsuit by the Human Rights Division of the High Court in Accra on 24 May 2024. The Court nonetheless required mandatory labelling of genetically modified food products. Because cowpea is a vital and historically inexpensive protein staple consumed daily across large segments of the population in traditional dishes such as *waakye* and red red, local advocacy groups¹⁷ protested the roll-out. These organizations asserted that the original 2022 environmental approval process had been conducted by the National Biosafety Authority with insufficient grass-roots consultation, had lacked transparent public risk assessment data and had bypassed robust mechanisms for local farmers to give informed consent at the community level.

39. Furthermore, the Working Group heard that the environmental risk assessments prior to approval had predominantly been focused on metrics of short-term agronomic yield. Critics argue that these assessments may not have adequately evaluated broader, long-term ecological impacts, such as potential interactions with non-target insect species or the socioeconomic implications of transitioning resource-poor farmers to proprietary corporate seed systems.

40. The Working Group heard concerns from civil society that the genetic traits of local seeds transferred to international gene banks may subsequently be isolated, genetically mapped and patented by multinational agrochemical corporations.¹⁸ The re-introduction of these genetic materials into the domestic market through proprietary, higher-cost hybrid seeds raises complex questions regarding the equitable sharing of benefits derived from traditional knowledge. The gradual replacement of resilient local varieties with commercial iterations risks the erosion of invaluable traditional ecological knowledge, including localized methods utilizing indigenous herbs for post-harvest seed preservation.

D. Women farmers

41. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas explicitly requires States to eliminate all forms of discrimination against peasant women and to ensure that they enjoy full human rights on the basis of equality. This specifically includes the mandate to ensure equal access to, and use and management of, land and natural resources (art. 4). In rural Ghana, women encounter profound intersectional barriers to economic sovereignty and physical security, influenced by the interplay between legal frameworks and deeply embedded customary practices.

42. The Government of Ghana has implemented policies intended to foster gender inclusion, such as the Affirmative Action Act, 2024, which establishes specific mandates, including a mandatory baseline of 30 per cent for women's representation in governance, public service and institutional decision-making roles by 2026. However, implementation remains challenging. Local distribution mechanisms for State agricultural inputs are often managed by traditional authorities or cooperative leaders. This is a dynamic that can inadvertently marginalize women and limit their participation in formal supply chains.

43. Furthermore, rural women experience systemic exclusion from formal agricultural credit and insurance programmes. Commercial financial institutions typically require stringent documentation, such as proof of business turnover, collateral and formal land titles. Because historical customary land tenure systems predominantly allocate land to men designated as "heads of household", women rarely hold the formal, independent titles required to satisfy modern financial instruments. This structural exclusion perpetually restricts their capacity to secure capital to scale their agricultural operations.

44. The legal framework governing inheritance also presents challenges. While the national Intestate Succession Act, which regulates property distribution in cases of marriage

¹⁷ Led by Food Sovereignty Ghana.

¹⁸ See <https://www.afronomicslaw.org/2019/04/17/the-proposed-plant-breeders-bill-of-ghana-and-the-food-sovereignty-conundrum>.

dissolution or the death of a spouse, has been updated to recognize non-monetary, indirect and domestic contributions as valid grounds for joint property ownership, a lack of formal documentation and uneven enforcement of the Act within rural agricultural communities often leave rights holders vulnerable.

45. A severe human rights concern affecting rural women in Ghana is the persistence of witchcraft accusations. This is a phenomenon predominantly occurring in the northern regions, including the Northern, North East and Savannah Regions. Civil society investigations indicate that these accusations function as a highly gendered, extralegal mechanism of socioeconomic penalization and control.¹⁹ The targets of these accusations are almost exclusively older, impoverished or childless women or, conversely, independent women who have achieved notable economic success outside traditional structures.

46. Survivors who escape violence are often compelled into internal displacement, seeking refuge in informal settlements problematically termed “witch camps”, located in communities such as Gambaga, Kukuo and Gnani. It has been reported that more than 500 individuals, primarily older women, reside in these camps across northern Ghana, with inadequate water, food and access to healthcare.²⁰ These camps exist due to the absence of formal State social protection programmes specifically tailored to displaced older rural women.

47. In response to advocacy by civil society, the Parliament of Ghana passed the Criminal Offences (Amendment) Bill (often called the anti-witchcraft accusations bill) on 27 July 2023. This legislation is aimed at criminalizing such accusations, banning violent witch-finding practices, dismantling the existing camps and providing State-funded reintegration remedies. However, the executive branch has delayed signing the bill into law. Although the Human Rights Select Committee recently reintroduced the bill, the delay in formalizing this protective legislation constitutes a continuing challenge to the State’s obligations under article 4 (non-discrimination) and article 6 (right to life and security of person) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

48. Despite confronting severe institutional and societal barriers, rural women have pioneered effective grass-roots mechanisms to enhance their economic resilience and compensate for service deficits. In regions such as Upper West, Northern and Savannah, civil society organizations have facilitated the implementation of “community land protocols”. These paralegal mechanisms synthesize international human rights principles with customary land acquisition processes. By formally negotiating and recording multi-year land leases with traditional chiefs, these protocols enable female farmers to bypass exclusionary inheritance norms and secure recognized, productive land tenure.

49. Furthermore, to mitigate exclusion from formal commercial banking, rural women have established extensive networks of village savings and loan associations. Information received by the Working Group highlighted the efficacy of federated village savings and loan association models. As of July 2026, over 25,000 such associations existed, with over 664,000 people served, 76 per cent of whom were women.²¹ This pooled capital is strategically deployed for agricultural investments, enabling women to purchase processing equipment and climate-resilient inputs entirely outside the formal financial sector. These grass-roots initiatives provide empirical models for effective, rights-based interventions that enhance localized economic stability.

E. Marine livelihoods and fisherfolk

50. The coastal and inland waterways of Ghana are critical to the national economy, supporting immense rural populations. From the outset, it is evident that the coastal communities of Ghana face an existential socioeconomic threat. An estimated 110,000 active

¹⁹ See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2025/04/ghana-branded-for-life/>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See <https://mis.thesavix.org/dashboard/admin>.

artisanal fishers²² operate a vast fleet of wooden canoes, in an industry estimated to involve 2.7 million persons. However, this traditional livelihood is currently in severe crisis. Official data indicate that the active artisanal canoe fleet and overall fishing effort exceed the sustainable capacity of local fish stocks by a factor of approximately two. This severe overcapacity is compounded by systemic overfishing, the proliferation of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing practices (such as chemical fishing, light fishing and illicit *saiko* transshipments) and the accelerating impacts of climate change, including warming surface waters and destructive coastal tidal waves. Combined with a distinct lack of viable alternative livelihood options, especially for male fishers, these overlapping pressures represent a serious challenge to the survival and future of the country's coastal populations.

51. This sector supplies the primary source of fish protein for the domestic population. However, the sector faces significant ecological pressures, with local fisherfolk reporting sustained, severe declines in small pelagic catches, which threaten the viability of coastal livelihoods. In addition, historical contexts highlight vulnerabilities within the inland sectors. For example, concerns have been raised regarding child labour and trafficking in the informal fishing operations of the Lake Volta region.²³ The Ghana Accelerated Action Plan Against Child Labour (2023–2027) is designed to address child labour issues, but implementation is reportedly affected by resource constraints.

52. The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2025, represents a substantial legislative shift towards ecological conservation. The Act formally defines the Inshore Exclusion Zone and expands it to 12 nautical miles. This measure is explicitly designed to prohibit industrial and large semi-industrial trawlers from operating within nutrient-rich coastal waters, reserving these areas exclusively for artisanal fleets. The State's ratification of the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188), signals a commitment to enhancing protections for maritime workers.

53. Despite these statutory advancements, implementation challenges persist, exacerbated by the informal nature of the sector. Small-scale fishing operations are heavily dominated by canoe owners, who exercise significant discretion over crew compensation structures, which can occasionally result in inadequate remuneration despite extensive labour inputs. The traditional, informal nature of these arrangements complicates the legal distinction between employer and employee. Consequently, efforts by labour organizations to unionize fishers and implement standard operating procedures for fair labour practices encounter significant structural hurdles. Fisheries extension officers were repeatedly praised for their competence and value, but the small number of such officers limits effectiveness.

54. Furthermore, the economic stability of the artisanal sector is compromised by the illicit practice of *saiko* fishing. This practice involves the illegal, at-sea transshipment of frozen, low-value fish bycatch from massive foreign industrial trawlers directly to specialized local artisanal canoes. *Saiko* fishing poses severe ecological risks by harvesting vast quantities of juvenile fish stocks, thereby preventing biological replenishment. Economically, it artificially depresses market prices for the fresh catch brought in by genuine artisanal fishers, impoverishing coastal communities while enabling industrial vessels to circumvent State tax regimes and regulations on catch limits.

55. To mitigate the depletion of marine fish stocks, the Government has mandated “closed seasons” across all fleets. While biological resting periods are recognized as ecologically indispensable for the recovery of marine habitats, the implementation of these production halts generates profound socioeconomic shocks across vulnerable coastal communities.

56. A primary structural challenge associated with these conservation mandates is the reported absence of corresponding transitional financial support or alternative livelihood training for affected fishers and their families. This deficit intersects with the protections mandated under article 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and

²² Clarence Osbert Nielemah Nuotuo, Kathleen Auld Yildiz and Francis Neat, “Governance implications of the world trade organization agreement on fisheries subsidies for Ghana's marine small-scale fisheries”, *Maritime Studies*, vol. 24, No. 67 (2025).

²³ See https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/migrated_files/What-We-Do/docs/IOM-Ghana-Child-Trafficking-Child-Protection-Campaign.pdf.

Other People Working in Rural Areas, which requires States to ensure an adequate standard of living. The economic burden of mandatory fishing closures falls disproportionately on the vast network of women fish processors and traders, who dominate the post-harvest value chain. Because these women frequently pre-finance artisanal fishing expeditions, the sudden halt in supply severs their income while trapping them in serious debt.²⁴

57. It was reported that, in the pre-closure phase, women frequently acquire high-interest loans to stockpile resources necessary for survival during the halt in supply. During the closed season, household income ceases entirely, as post-harvest processing constitutes their sole livelihood. During the post-closure recovery phase, newly generated revenues are largely consumed by the servicing of accumulated debts. This structural dynamic can trap women processors in cycles of financial vulnerability, inadvertently transforming an essential ecological intervention into a source of localized economic hardship.

F. Pastoralists and transhumance

58. Pastoralists fill a vital role in Ghana, supplying the vast majority of the domestic cattle, sheep and goat populations. Because these systems utilize marginal, rain-fed rangelands, primarily in the Northern, Savannah and Upper East Regions, they convert low-value biomass into high-value protein without competing with intensive grain-fed systems or crop production. By bringing cattle from countries in the Sahel region, they also support Ghanaian district assemblies through the payment of direct taxes, quarantine fees and transit tolls on pastoral herds. The clearing, trucking and transaction fees paid at livestock trading hubs (Ashaiman, Kumasi and Techiman) further support rural economies.²⁵

59. Shifting climate patterns, including erratic precipitation and accelerated desertification in the Sahel region, are disrupting traditional transhumance cycles. Pastoralists, predominantly from the Fulbe ethnic group, are reportedly often denied formal citizenship documentation. The Land Act, 2020, which codified settled customary ownership, has not addressed the issue of migratory grazing corridors. As climate change steadily erodes northern pastures, herds are pushed further south into settled agricultural zones. This friction has led to violent, localized conflicts over land and water, although it was reported that this situation has improved in recent years.

60. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas explicitly recognizes transhumant, nomadic and semi-nomadic communities under its protective framework (art. 1). Furthermore, under article 18, States have obligations to combat climate change and take appropriate measures to ensure that peasants and other people working in rural areas enjoy a safe, clean and healthy environment. The forced alteration of migratory routes highlights the severe vulnerability of pastoralists to environmental degradation, necessitating urgent, climate-adaptive State interventions.

61. Agricultural expansion, urbanization and the privatization of communal spaces have severely restricted pastoral access to necessary water bodies and fodder. Article 17 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas guarantees pastoralists the right to land, explicitly encompassing access to pastures to achieve an adequate standard of living. In addition, article 21 affirms the right to water for personal use as well as for livestock keeping, mandating equitable access to water management systems. When these rights are not systematically guaranteed by State frameworks, the resulting resource scarcity can trigger intercommunal violence, endangering the security and livelihoods of both farmers and herders.

62. State and local administrative responses to these resource pressures have frequently trended towards a security-based approach to pastoral mobility rather than addressing the structural root causes of land-use competition and climate stress. Information received and

²⁴ Victor Owusu, “Effects of the closed fishing season on small-scale fisheries and coastal livelihoods in Ghana”, *Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*, vol. 27, No. 11 (2024).

²⁵ IOM, International Centre for Migration Policy Development and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), *Regional Policies and Response to Manage Pastoral Movements within the ECOWAS Region* (Abuja, IOM, 2019).

human rights monitoring data indicate that border control policies, municipal ordinances and localized security networks routinely target Fulbe herders. Civil society organizations report that State-sanctioned security initiatives, most notably the evictions carried out jointly by the military and the police, alongside actions by community vigilante groups, frequently subject the Fulbe community to ethnic profiling, arbitrary detention, forced expulsion and disproportionate violence.²⁶

63. Sustainable policy frameworks must work to integrate pastoralists into comprehensive national land-use planning. Addressing the shared vulnerability of both sedentary farmers and transhumant herders is essential to secure their respective livelihoods and establish enduring, violence-free resource management systems. The Ghana National Spatial Development Framework 2015–2035, legally enforced through the Land Use and Spatial Planning Act, 2016 (Act 925), establishes a decentralized three-tier planning hierarchy managed by the Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority and local government assemblies. To mitigate resource conflicts between migratory pastoralists and sedentary farmers, the framework outlines dedicated livestock corridors, agricultural zoning and a strategic policy shift from open-range mobile pastoralism towards intensive, sedentary livestock production. However, this framework fails to resolve herder-farmer conflicts due to a disconnect between top-down statutory planning and customary land tenure. Because traditional authorities manage approximately 80 per cent of land in Ghana and negotiate grazing access through informal arrangements, State-mandated corridors are functionally unenforceable on customary holdings.²⁷ This operational limitation is compounded by an explicit developmental bias that favours commercial crop expansion, thereby compressing available grazing space. The framework's push for stationary ranching ignores both the ecological necessity of seasonal herder mobility and the capital constraints of marginalized pastoralists. Lacking pastoralist representation in boundary design and restricted by the weak enforcement capacity of local district assemblies, the framework's static zoning maps remain ineffective at managing open-range resource competition.

64. Most seriously, the framework does not provide pastoralists with representation in the spatial zoning design, so the mapped grazing blocks and corridors fail to align with historical migratory tracks, water access points or seasonal grazing realities, ensuring that any layout is not supported by the very people whom it was intended to regulate.

65. To reconcile the tensions between pastoralists and settled farming communities, regulatory interventions are being pursued at both the regional and the national levels. The primary legal framework governing cross-border pastoralism in West Africa is decision A/DEC.5/10/98 of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) relating to the regulations on transhumance between ECOWAS member States, supplemented by regulation C/REG.3/01/03 of the ECOWAS Council of Ministers (Protocol on Transhumance), which guarantees free passage for livestock across member States on the strict condition that herds possess an ECOWAS international transhumance certificate. This decision regulates cross-border mobility by mandating certified animal vaccinations, requiring the indication of specific itineraries and enforcing border crossing rules, such as the prohibition of night movement. At the national level, the Government of Ghana has operationalized these regional mandates by establishing the National Transhumance Committee and localized conflict arbitration frameworks designed to secure dedicated transhumance routes, or transfer corridors. These structural corridors are designed to delineate clear boundaries between arable farmland and migratory paths, ensuring that herders can access essential water bodies and grazing lands without encroaching on family-based smallholder plots. However, reports indicate that the implementation of these measures is severely delayed and that local district authorities are often obstacles to implementation.

²⁶ Chikodiri Nwangwu, "Herders without borders: transhumance securitisation and the challenges of national security in Ghana and Nigeria" *Security Journal*, vol. 38, No. 3 (2025).

²⁷ World Bank, "Ghana to scale up land administration services with World Bank support", press release, 21 November 2018.

G. Illegal small-scale mining

66. The Working Group visited the Kyebi area to witness industrial-scale illegal mining operations. Industrial excavators and earth-moving equipment were seen throughout the area, visible from the highways and with no efforts to disguise the activities. Local chiefs and district authorities were aware of the activities in the region.

67. The rapid expansion, industrialization and mechanization of artisanal and small-scale mining, locally known as *galamsey*, constitute a significant environmental and human rights challenge in rural Ghana. Recent sectoral data show a rapid increase in small-scale mining production. Between 2024 and 2025, small-scale mining output increased by over 63 per cent, generating 52.4 per cent of the national gold output (totalling approximately 3.1 million ounces).²⁸ This is the first time in over a century of record-keeping that the artisanal sector's production has exceeded that of formal, large-scale industrial mining operations. It was reported that this is due to the import and use of large-scale construction equipment. There is a need to investigate how the high costs of financing heavy machinery are being managed and how the legally imposed barriers to importing this equipment are being navigated by apparently small-scale miners.

68. Initial assessments of *galamsey* frequently categorized the practice as an informal, poverty-driven, grass-roots enterprise reliant on manual labour. However, evidence seen by the Working Group indicates a highly mechanized operational landscape. Operations routinely involve the massive deployment of heavy earth-moving equipment, including industrial excavators and large-scale river dredgers, deep within rural river basins and constitutionally protected forest reserves governed by the Forests Act, 1927, and the Forestry Commission Act, 1999.

69. The rapid expansion of illegal mining renders the environmental protections of the Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1994 (Act 490), which governs the classification and use of agrochemicals and environmental assessments, and the Water Resources Commission Act, 1996, practically inert and unenforceable in heavily affected rural regions. This regulatory unenforceability leads to a catastrophic collapse of the local agrarian ecosystem, contaminating nearly every stream or waterway in these areas. The ecological impacts of illegal *galamsey* directly intersect with article 18 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, which guarantees rural populations the right to a safe, clean and healthy environment, and article 21, which asserts the right to clean and safe water.

70. The importation, transportation and continuous fuelling of such heavy machinery suggest a highly capitalized sector that operates with significant logistical sophistication. It was alleged that the large-scale movements of equipment often bypass regional security checkpoints, at ports and within the country, suggesting potential complicity or regulatory failure involving certain State actors, local political figures and traditional authorities. It was reported that attempts to report these activities to local police were often met with indifference or obstruction.

71. In response to the proliferation of unauthorized mining, the State has primarily utilized security-led, militarized interventions, notably "Operation Vanguard" and "Operation Halt", which involve the deployment of joint military and police task forces. Information received suggests that these enforcement operations are frequently focused on the immediate disruption of activities at the mining sites, often resulting in the arrest of low-level, impoverished daily labourers. Conversely, the well-capitalized financiers and equipment owners who orchestrate the operations are reportedly less frequently subjected to successful prosecution. Furthermore, these military operations have occasionally resulted in tensions with local agricultural communities and frequently precipitate a "balloon effect", leading to the immediate geographical displacement of mining operations into adjacent, previously unaffected districts, limiting long-term environmental remediation.

²⁸ Ghana Chamber of Mines, *2025 Annual Report* (2026).

72. The extraction process utilized by illegal miners relies heavily on toxic chemicals, specifically mercury and cyanide, which are frequently used in amalgamation processes directly adjacent to or within waterways.

73. This practice has resulted in severe and widespread contamination of critical national river systems, notably including the Pra, Offin, Densu, Ankobra and Birim Rivers.²⁹ An estimated 60 per cent of rivers and water bodies in Ghana are polluted and unfit for human consumption.³⁰ The chemical load introduced into these water systems has compromised public utility infrastructure, driving up municipal water treatment costs significantly. Consequently, impoverished rural households face increased financial burdens: residents in mining-affected communities report being forced to travel to other communities in search of potable water and to purchase it from private vendors, while also needing to secure clean water for their crops, exacerbating rural poverty. Requests by villages for boreholes for drinking water are reportedly routinely denied due to cost or the contamination of underground water tables.

74. The environmental degradation extends to profound public health and agricultural safety concerns. Civil society reports and academic studies indicate that heavy metal contamination is increasingly detected within local food crops cultivated in proximity to mining sites or irrigated with contaminated water, including staple crops such as yams, sweet potatoes and leafy greens. Concerns were raised that cocoa production was also being affected. This bioaccumulation is reportedly associated with rising, localized rates of health complications among rural populations, including kidney dysfunction, neurological issues and congenital abnormalities.

75. Furthermore, the socioeconomic fabric of the agrarian sector is affected. The degradation of viable agricultural land, coupled with the allure of comparatively lucrative *galamsey* wages, contributes to an exodus of rural youth from traditional agriculture, leaving many peasant farms with only ageing parents to work them, in some cases leading to demand for illegal migrant labourers from neighbouring countries, as well as child labourers.

76. Recognizing the limitations of current regulatory frameworks in addressing extensive environmental degradation, a movement for enhanced legal accountability has emerged within domestic institutions. On 9 March 2026, a coalition of parliamentarians, supported by the Minority Chief Whip, advocated in the legislature for the introduction of a national law criminalizing “ecocide”, defined as the mass, systemic destruction of ecosystems.³¹ The proponents argued that environmental stability was foundational to food security and human health and that the consequences of unchecked mining were detrimental to future generations.

77. This legislative initiative complements substantial civil society advocacy. On 3 October 2025, the Ghana Coalition Against Galamsey submitted an evidence-based petition to the presidency. The signatories demanded immediate action, presenting data indicating local mercury levels at 560 per cent above safe limits.³² These domestic efforts are supported by broader regional policy developments, notably decision 20/4, adopted by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment at its twentieth session, held in Nairobi on 16 and 17 July 2025, to include the penalization of severe environmental destruction among the continent’s strategic priorities. Establishing robust judicial accountability mechanisms for environmental damage is critical for fulfilling the rights articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

78. The Ministry of Land and Natural Resources has promoted the Ghana Community Mining Scheme, framed as a regulatory initiative to formalize and regularize artisanal small-scale mining under the Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703). On paper, the scheme

²⁹ Kwame Anokye and Lois Okyere Darko, “Ecological responses to anthropogenic stress: restoring degraded landscapes from galamsey activities in Ghana – a review”, *Cleaner Waste Systems*, vol. 12 (December 2025).

³⁰ See <https://www.modernghana.com/news/775087/60-of-ghanas-water-bodies-polluted-water-resources-commi.html>.

³¹ See <https://www.stopecocide.earth/bn-2025/ghana-mps-urge-parliament-to-criminalise-ecocide>.

³² See <https://ghana.arocho.org/2025/10/03/act-now-coalition-tells-president-to-stop-galamsey-ecocide/>.

aspires to legally integrate local populations into safer, regulated gold extraction, with provisions for environmental oversight, site reclamation and mercury-free processing technologies. Civil society and professional bodies, however, have expressed mixed views. While some see scope for community-owned, better regulated artisanal mining if the model is fundamentally reformed, others have criticized the scheme as politicized and too close to existing *galamsey* operations. Any such initiative will ultimately require not only effective enforcement by underresourced regulators, but also robust safeguards against capture by powerful interests benefiting from illegal mining.

H. Accountability framework

79. The capacity of peasant communities and rural workers to realize the rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas is heavily dependent upon the availability of robust institutional frameworks and access to effective remedies for human rights abuses. Article 12 provides for the right to effective and non-discriminatory access to justice. Information received by the Working Group indicates that the enforcement of economic, social and cultural rights through the formal Ghanaian judicial system presents significant practical challenges for rural populations. Identified barriers include the prohibitive financial costs associated with pursuing a legal claim, a lack of accessible and affordable legal aid in remote regions and districts and concerns regarding the capacity of local courts to adjudicate complex claims involving large commercial interests effectively and impartially.

80. The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice is the primary constitutional body mandated to investigate allegations of fundamental rights violations by public officers, private individuals and corporate entities. The Commission possesses considerable expertise in the area of business and human rights and regularly manages a significant caseload, historically addressing thousands of general complaints annually, including complex cases related to business operations. The Commission frequently utilizes mediation processes to secure remedies for rural communities affected by corporate activities, such as facilitating the restoration of degraded agricultural lands and securing access to clean water.

81. However, the operational effectiveness of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice is reportedly constrained by chronic resource limitations. Reports indicate that the failure to allocate sufficient financial and human resources restricts the Commission's ability to maintain a robust, permanent operational presence in remote rural districts. This geographical limitation is particularly relevant, as the impacts of unauthorized mining, corporate land acquisitions and farmer-herder conflicts are most acute in these underserved areas. Consequently, numerous potential human rights violations may remain uninvestigated. Furthermore, the Commission's reliance on non-binding mediation, coupled with a lack of direct prosecutorial authority, necessitates routing non-compliant cases through the deeply overburdened Attorney General's office, frequently resulting in protracted delays in securing justice against well-capitalized corporate actors. Concurrently, other key oversight bodies, such as the Labour Inspectorate, have also reported capacity constraints that hinder comprehensive monitoring of labour standards across diverse sectors.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

82. Ghana has developed a relatively strong set of laws and policies relevant to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. However, their potential is significantly diminished by gaps and weaknesses in implementation on the ground. The convergence of deeply rooted customary patriarchal norms, the effects of climate change, the catastrophic environmental devastation wrought by illegal mining and a macroeconomic policy pivot towards large-scale commercial agriculture requires not only statutory protections, but also meaningful implementation to ensure that the rights of Ghanaian farmers, fishers, pastoralists and other rural workers are adequately respected, protected and fulfilled. To fully align its agricultural transformation with its international human rights

obligations, Ghana must reconcile the deep tension between the growing support for export-oriented, large-scale, input-intensive production models and the rights of the peasant farmers, ensuring that the progressive legislative frameworks designed to protect farmers are effectively and equitably enforced at the community level.

83. The Working Group notes with appreciation the political commitment of the Government of Ghana to improve the well-being of its farmers, fishers and pastoralists, which is a pathway to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. The Working Group notes with appreciation the advances that Ghana has made in tackling some of the challenges faced by peasants, fisherfolk and other people living in rural areas.

A. Recommendations to the Government

84. On the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, the Working Group recommends that the Government:

(a) Enact explicit implementing legislation to domesticate and disseminate the Declaration, translating it into local dialects and integrating it into the activities of district assemblies and customary institutions;

(b) Adequately fund and staff the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice to enable it to raise awareness of the Declaration and to strengthen the protection of the rights provided for in the Declaration;

(c) Expand affordable legal aid services in regions and districts to enable peasant communities, especially women farmers, to pursue judicial enforcement of their rights.

85. On the agrarian sector, the Working Group recommends that the Government:

(a) Explore shifting agricultural subsidy programmes away from synthetic agrochemicals towards structural investments in post-harvest physical infrastructure, local agroprocessing and all-weather rural feeder roads;

(b) Establish accessible, low-interest credit and crop insurance programmes tailored to small-scale farmers;

(c) Amend statutory labour regulations to extend formal labour protections and social security frameworks to seasonal farmhands, casual agricultural labourers and sharecroppers.

86. On land acquisition, resettlement and stakeholder engagement, the Working Group recommends that the Government:

(a) Enforce the Land Act, 2020, to ensure that customary land secretariats transparently identify and protect the rights of all land users, including landless tenant farmers;

(b) Mandate that environmental and social impact assessments and project notices be translated into local dialects, published locally and accompanied by meaningful public consultations;

(c) Take measures to ensure that consultation requirements in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas and the Land Act are regularly enforced;

(d) Ensure that unavoidable resettlements prioritize comprehensive livelihood restoration, including land-for-land replacement, rather than single-disbursement cash compensation;

(e) Require that displacement compensation assessments explicitly evaluate how women experience land and livelihood loss differently from men.

87. On the right to seeds, biological diversity and environmental decision-making, the Working Group recommends that the Government:

(a) Review the Plant Variety Protection Act, 2020, to ensure that its provisions and implementation do not undermine traditional peasant seed saving, developing, sharing and selling systems;

(b) Guarantee transparent, grass-roots public consultation and independent ecological risk assessments before the approval or commercial release of genetically modified crops.

88. On the rights of women farmers, the Working Group recommends that the Government:

(a) Enact the Criminal Offences (Amendment) Bill into law immediately, dismantle existing “witch camps” and provide comprehensive reintegration support for survivors;

(b) Provide statutory guidance to the judiciary to formally recognize and quantify the economic value of women’s unpaid agricultural and domestic labour in property and inheritance disputes;

(c) Enforce and monitor the 30 per cent women’s inclusion mandate under the Affirmative Action Act, 2024, to combat systemic gender discrimination.

89. On the rights of pastoralists and transhumant populations, the Working Group recommends that the Government:

(a) Closely engage with district authorities to address the conflicts and exclusion faced by pastoralists, including the Fulbe;

(b) Expedite the national implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance by engaging with pastoralists and traditional and local authorities to establish lasting grazing corridors and resting points.

90. On illegal small-scale mining (*galamsey*), the Working Group recommends that the Government:

(a) Shift the focus of law enforcement away from impoverished labourers towards the investigation, prosecution and asset forfeiture of the well-capitalized financiers orchestrating mechanized illegal mining;

(b) Consider the adoption of national legislation criminalizing ecocide to establish severe judicial accountability for the systemic destruction of ecosystems and river systems, and strengthen the enforcement powers and resources of the Environmental Protection Authority to address *galamsey*-related activities;

(c) Commit significant State resources to the immediate ecological remediation of contaminated river systems and public health monitoring for heavy metal bioaccumulation;

(d) Expand alternative economic livelihood and vocational training programmes tailored to rural youth to disincentivize entry into hazardous mining.

B. Recommendations to civil society

91. The Working Group recommends that civil society:

(a) Facilitate the translation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas and its distribution to rights holders, and advocate for the implementation of the rights contained in the Declaration in national legislation;

(b) Maintain independent monitoring and reporting of violations relevant to the Declaration, including environmental degradation, land evictions, witchcraft accusations and farmer-herder conflicts.

C. Recommendations to United Nations entities and international development partners

92. The Working Group recommends that United Nations entities and international development partners:

(a) Systematically integrate the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas across all programmatic interventions and into the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework;

(b) Provide targeted technical assistance to the Government of Ghana to align seed and biosafety laws with human rights standards and norms, operationalize the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188), and support the development and implementation of transhumance corridors;

(c) Ensure that regional and bilateral trade agreements, structural adjustment requirements and development funding empower the Government to implement agricultural policies that support smallholder farming and strengthen food sovereignty.
